

ANNAMITE CIVILIZATION

to it in the West, and no effort is made to achieve a realistic presentation. Old names and places are used to depict current events. All this is but a part of the Annamite belief that civilization is immutable, so modern acting of obsolete scenes is not considered an anachronism. The Chinese Annals are the material upon which the Annamite drama draws. It is curious that peace-loving peoples like the Chinese and Annamites should revel in such blood-curdling drama. What they go to see in the theatre is a portrayal of historical events which they already know by heart, and which are most disdainful of their own country, aping as they do the Chinese viewpoint. Interpretation of these legends is fixed with such precision that the slightest infraction of tradition is penalized. There is no room for individual interpretation. The drama is a synthesis of Annamite life with eleven type-characters: the king, princes, dignitaries, civil and military mandarins, warriors, and finally men and women of honourable and of servile condition. Likewise the hierarchal spirit world is synthetically represented. The value of the performance is social: its symbolism makes of it an allegory in which the traditional costumes and stereotyped gestures at once permit the spectator, fore-armed with knowledge and in spite of sketchy scenery and props, to assign to every performer his role. This effort to depict the universal and the abstract in human life, rather than the local and realistic, in the theatre makes the Annamite drama akin to the Greek. It is typical of Annamite theatre-going that only a few scenes are in the Annamite language, whereas the rest are in an archaic Chinese incomprehensible to audience and actors alike. The strained voice, which must be forced for days to carry over the tumult, and the crashing

music, complete
the setting in which the Annamite heart rejoices as in
nothing eke,
despite its lack of repose or of melancholy relief.

ANNAMITE ART

Ritual dominates Annamite art as it does every other
form of national
expression. The perennial need felt *by the Annamites
for protection
against hostile forces is translated into their art as a
religious obsession,
Since both Chinese rites and rules prevail, the artisan
naturally becomes
the slave of a rigorous taskmaster who keeps him
copying his prede-
cessors and away from the direct observation of
nature. So faithful is
he, that in some Annamite pictures one sees the
vegetation of China
totally unknown in Indo-China. The necessity for
seeing everything
in the light of the past gives a curiously archaic
character to Annamite